

## With The Retirement Of Lewis, Is Vitali Klitschko The Man ?

Written by Frank Lotierzo

Wednesday, 11 February 2004 18:00

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With the recent retirement of former heavyweight champ Lennox Lewis, it seems that Vitali Klitschko is being touted as the next champ. Klitschko may very well be the next champ. He may even be the best heavyweight in the world. But what does that really say about him or how good he really is? The word great is a word that I think is thrown around too much today. And don't tell me that I don't give today's fighters enough credit, because I do. I just don't term every fighter great who recently won a big fight. I have no problem paying homage to any fighter of this era who has truly earned the word great attached to his name.

Since Muhammad Ali retired in 1979, there have been exactly three great heavyweights. Larry Holmes, Evander Holyfield, and Lennox Lewis. Mike Tyson and Riddick Bowe were great talents, but Tyson lost the three signature fights of his career badly. Too me, you have to beat at least one of the best fighters you faced. Tyson can't say that. Regarding Riddick Bowe, he won the only signature fight of his career, but outside of beating Holyfield he didn't beat any other fighter who would merit him into the Hall-Of-Fame. Plus, his overall body of work lacks quality opposition and longevity. I'm sure many will have a problem with my view on Tyson and Bowe, but that's my opinion.

That brings us back to Vitali Klitschko. Is he a great fighter, can he ever accomplish the same feats as Lewis? I would say that right now Vitali is not a great heavyweight, but I believe he does have a chance to go on to achieve greatness. Another thing that must be said for Vitali is, he has never really been bettered in any of his fights. Against Byrd, he was leading before he had to pull out of the fight. Although I don't think he was ahead by as much as the judges had him up, he was still winning. In his title fight versus Lennox Lewis, he was leading when his severely cut eye caused the Ring Doctor to stop the fight. That doesn't mean he was on his way to certain victory, but he was leading at the end. When looking at the heavyweight division's top ten contenders, I believe that only Vitali Klitschko has a chance to rule the division.

Chris Byrd and James Toney are great fighters, but I doubt they'll ever be regarded as great heavyweights. Roy Jones is certainly not a great heavyweight. No way does beating John Ruiz qualify him as a great heavyweight. That leaves Corrie Sanders, David Tua, John Ruiz, Hasim Rahman, Wladimir Klitschko, Juan Carlos Gomez, and Fres Oquendo. I think it's safe to say that neither of those eight will ever be called great under any circumstances.

That is exactly why the division is wide open for Vitali Klitschko. After seeing his last two fights versus Lewis and Kirk Johnson, I can't envision any one of the other top contenders beating him. When looking at Klitschko as a fighter within himself, there are a few things that suggest he isn't all that. However, when you look at him and match him up versus the other top heavyweights, he looks very formidable.

Vitali is a very big heavyweight who knows how to use his size. He is not very fast or is he an outstanding boxer, but he has a pretty good jab and a good right hand. Vitali is very strong and going off of his performance in his recent fights versus Lewis and Johnson, I get the feeling that

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he believes in himself and harbors no lack of confidence. Klitschko also has shown the mental toughness that many thought he lacked after the Byrd fight. Along with being tough, he showed a very good chin. Lewis hit him with a few huge shots in their fight last June, and he took them as well as anyone could've expected.

What we have in Klitschko is a guy who is one of the biggest fighters in the division who I believe is totally focused on winning the heavyweight title. Couple that with some ability, power, a sturdy chin and desire, you have one imposing fighter. Vitali, like his brother has a terrific work ethic and always shows up in top shape. Something that cannot be said about at least half of today's other top contenders.

Another big factor that I think enables Vitali to possibly be the next man in the division is, who's out there to cause him any major problems? There is not an Ali or Holmes around at present who have enough size, speed, boxing ability, and toughness to beat him. There is no power house like a young Foreman who had the size and power to deal with him. Exactly who is the fighter who can present him as many problems and obstacles that he poses them?

We already saw that he's too big for Byrd, and I believe the same would apply to Toney. We know that he would be a nightmare for Jones, not that Jones would even joke about fighting him. Corrie Sanders may be able to compete with him, but he's not a good enough fighter to overcome the size and strength that he gives up. Plus, I doubt that he can turn the fight with one punch against Vitali like he did Wladimir.

David Tua has a punchers chance versus Vitali, but I'd bet my life that he'd never get close enough to land any of his bombs on Klitschko's chin. Rahman, not a chance. Rahman is a decent boxer at best who can hurt you if he catches you with the perfect shot. Vitali would control him with his jab and either give him a severe beating or stop him. Same with Ruiz. Ruiz leads with his face, he's slow and not a real good boxer. Klitschko is just too much for Ruiz no matter how you look at it. Juan Carlos Gomez is a pretty good boxer , but Klitschko would force him to fight instead of boxing and taking advantage of his southpaw style. Gomez ain't beaten Vitali.

Who's that leave, Fres Oquendo? Oquendo is a pretty good fighter, but he isn't really outstanding at anything. He's not real fast, he isn't a great boxer and he isn't a great puncher. I don't see how he would win. Klitschko would pressure him and push him back, making Fres either move away trying to survive, or standing his ground and trying to fight. Which would lead to his defeat.

Right now it seems there are Vitali Klitschko fans all over. Boxing isn't any different than other sports when it comes to its fans. Everybody loves a winner, or a perceived winner. I like Vitali and respect his work ethic. He respects Boxing and has shown much class in the aftermath of Lewis' retirement. However, I don't think he is a great fighter at present.

I see some significant holes in Vitali's game. If he was fighting among a different crop of heavyweights, I don't think he would be the perceived heir apparent to Lewis. Like I said when you look at him within himself and what he can do, his size and toughness are his biggest

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assets. In a different era and time, that wouldn't have been enough.

However, when you look at him and match him up with the rest of his contemporaries, the holes in his game don't look so big. He actually looks like the odds on favorite to soon be recognized at the world's top heavyweight. Vitali Klitschko is very good and will be very tough to beat, but he has not earned the high praise of being called a great fighter. What he has earned is the right to be considered the man who will succeed Lennox Lewis. If he does go onto succeed Lewis, than he will have positioned himself to stake his claim as to whether or not he'll be remembered in the same vain as possibly one of the greats. But he's not there yet. That's why he'll be under the microscope for the next couple of years. We all want to see how far he can go?